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SHARON TRACTS, 1.

What the Ethical Movement is.

(AND WHO CAN JOIN IT)

By HARRY SNELL

ONE PENNY

PHAROS TRACTS, I.

¶ Men must do for morality what has already been done for the other sciences—free it from the domination of theology.

What the Ethical Movement is. (And who can Join it).

BY HARRY SNELL

(General Secretary to the Union of Ethical Societies).

"OPINIONS ALTER, MANNERS CHANGE, CREEDS ARISE AND FALL, BUT THE MORAL LAW IS WRITTEN ON THE TABLETS OF ETERNITY."—*Froude.*

ONE PENNY.

NORTHAMPTON:
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What the Ethical Movement is

(AND WHO CAN JOIN IT).

The Twentieth Century will witness the development of a great new universal church—the church of Humanity, which will succeed the church Militant.

The Ethical Movement is that church.

Not that the Ethical Movement is an entirely new thing, even in England. The principles it teaches have been the inspiration of men since social experience first began. What is new is that these principles should be accepted as the basis of religious union ; that they should declare their own supremacy and sufficiency ; that they should cast off association with all existing creeds and churches, and, like Jehovah of old, demand that they alone should be worshipped and served.

This tract is written to explain what the Ethical Movement is, what principles it accepts, and where it differs from all the religions that have preceded it. For it is as a new religion that the Ethical Movement claims to be heard and judged.

The Ethical Movement differs from all preceding religions inasmuch as there is nothing in it which is mysterious and transcendental. It teaches nothing that is outside any man's experience. Any child can understand it, and become its advocate. It requires no priest and no revealer. It is perfectly simple and direct, and yet so potent for good that none can exhaust its possibilities.

What the Ethical Movement is.

The central purpose of the Ethical Movement is to establish in the world a religion of devotion to the right apart from all supernatural sanctions. It teaches that the "good life" has a supreme claim upon man because of its undeniable worth to humanity. It seeks to advance the good and to overcome the evil in the world, not in obedience to the will of any Supernatural Being, but solely because moral endeavour is indispensable to both personal and social progress. It seeks to establish morality apart from supernaturalism, and to promote goodness without any inducement of rewards and punishments. With regard to the origin of the good and the evil, and the final goal of the universe, the Ethical Movement affirms no creed. Its members may have divergent views upon these great problems, but they unite in a common devotion to the good in the world, and they strive to direct the mighty force of enthusiasm and devotion which has too often been dissipated in superstitious practice and fanaticism, to the needs of man upon the earth on which he lives and suffers. It starts from the inevitable distinctions between good and evil which are recognised by all civilised communities, and it seeks to direct to human needs every unused or misapplied force for good.

The Ethical Movement is therefore an organisation devoted to the promotion of those moral principles about which all men are agreed, and to the further study of those moral problems concerning which they may perhaps differ.

The Ethical Movement stands for morality without theology. It elevates simple goodness to the supreme place in the world. It insists that every man shall devote his utmost to the highest, and in labour directed to noble ends it recognises the only true religion.

Teaching the doctrine of simple devotion to the right, the Ethical Movement contains all the strength and inspiration of the old religions of the world without any of their bigotry and intolerance. Everything of value to mankind that they have ever taught it also teaches. It

takes from every religion the one principle that is common to them all, and after delivering it from all mystery, pedantry and particularism, offers it as the basis of a new religious movement.

The Ethical Movement is therefore wider in its outlook than any or than all the churches that now exist. Theist and Atheist alike can unite in its service. No one is excluded because of his personal opinions as to God, Christ, the Bible, or the origin of man. It welcomes as members all who place morality above creeds, dogma and ceremony, provided they are willing to serve the good from no other motive than its own inherent worth.

On its intellectual side the Ethical Movement is a child of the modern scientific spirit. It will pay any price for truth, and it accepts all knowledge with gratitude and reverence. Its gospel is based upon scientific and social experience, and it holds no view that it would not abandon without an hour's remorse should increased knowledge prove it to be false. The one fanaticism of the Ethical Movement is its passion for veracity. With St. Paul it declares "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

On its spiritual side the Ethical Movement is heir at law of all the great teachers of every age and every creed. Like an industrious bee it gathers honey from every flower that blows. It accepts no one teacher as comprehending all the moral possibilities of man—neither Socrates, Jesus, Buddha, nor Mahomet—but it exalts to the position of a god that spirit of goodness of which Socrates, Jesus, Buddha and Mahomet were great embodiments. The Ethical Movement is therefore the bridge over which humanity may cross from the old religion to the new, and find in the new everything it really cared for in the old.

The philosophy of the Ethical Movement is, therefore, as clear and direct as a ray of light. While the profoundest intellect cannot surpass it, the humblest can comprehend it. Nor is this directness and simplicity a defect. There are those who insist that mankind loves the mysterious, and that it will respond only to something that it fears but does not understand. A religion of

daily life, it is said, is too prosaic, too commonplace to influence men's hearts and lives, and that to achieve success a movement must be supported by the incomprehensible, by a dazing ritual and an involved terminology.

The Ethical Movement declares these statements to be untrue. In the name of humanity it repudiates the suggestion that men will suffer, and strive, and die for the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, for miracles, for the ritual of the Roman or Anglican churches, and remain cold and indifferent to the claims of love, helpfulness and human sympathy. The Ethical Movement emphasises the worth and dignity of the sane and the normal. Mankind does not really prefer theology to morality. On the contrary, morality has been the essential thing in religious experience, whereas theology has been discarded in proportion as men have realised how great an incumbrance to progress it has been.

The Ethical Movement believes that, just as a man is more loveable than the clothes that he wears, so is morality infinitely more attractive and alluring when stripped of the shoddy textures which ages of ignorance and credulity have woven around it. There is a charm in self-realisation that exceeds the delights of ritual, and men experience, through devotion to the right, a warmth and joy quite as great as in supernatural speculation.

The Ethical Bond of Union.

The Ethical Movement declares that the bond of what men call religious union should be that of common devotion to the good, the true and the beautiful, and a hatred of the bad, the false, and the foul. This is the only Bond of Union that the whole of mankind can accept, and this the Ethical Movement offers as the Religion of the Twentieth Century. It insists that simple goodness, as expressed in a fruitful, sane, and creative life, constitutes the only religion that the future is likely to accept, and that a man who lacks this, though he be as pious as a monk and as orthodox as the Pope is, in fact, a grossly irreligious man.

This great creative idea the Ethical Movement seeks to popularise by founding Ethical Societies everywhere, and by inducing all men to join them. It seeks to free the ideal of the good life from all that is perplexing and terrifying, all that is professional and exclusive, and to make it accessible to the poor man in his cottage, the rich man in his castle, and to the trader at his mart. For the Ethical Movement this one idea is the Law and the Prophets and the Ten Commandments all in one. It contains everything for which mankind is or ought to be grateful.

The Ethical Movement and the Church.

The Ethical Movement has much in common with the Christian Church and it has also some fundamental differences. Just in so far as the Church is endeavouring to strengthen a man's sense of his moral responsibility in his social and personal relations, it has in the Ethical Movement a friend. The Ethical Movement has no desire to arrest the growth of the nation's pieties; on the contrary, its special mission is to liberate them from dogma and ceremony that they may develop more freely.

But in so far as the Church makes belief in certain speculative dogmas the bond of religious union it finds in the Ethical Movement a relentless and uncompromising foe. It will permit no speculative dogma to be set up as a barrier to a man's claim to share the joys of fellowship with his fellow creatures. It denounces as anti-social and immoral any church, creed, or priest that says to a soul hungry for fellowship, "believe first in this or that dogma or you cannot enter into our communion." All that the Ethical Movement has any claim, right, or desire to know concerning any man, is that he owns complete allegiance to the moral ideal and that he intends to dedicate his life to its service.

The Independence of Ethics.

The central philosophical idea of the Ethical Movement is the independence of ethics. This means that men's moral ideas and their moral life may be and ought

to be independent of their beliefs concerning a reality beyond experience and of a life after death. It does not say that there is not a reality beyond experience nor a life after death, but it insists that the moral life of man is not dependent on belief in these things. It declares that the moral ideal is "sovereign," absolute and independent, the supreme thing to which all men own allegiance.

The Ethical Movement insists that right is an "ultimate concept, resolvable into nothing more fundamental than itself, admitting of no explanation save in terms of itself." It thinks with Kant that the moral law is supreme over God and man alike, and with Emerson that "the moral laws vindicate themselves."

The theologian may insist that this exaltation of conduct is an atheistic device to destroy belief in God. The Ethical Movement disclaims any such desire or intention. In regard to the existence of God or as to a life after death it has absolutely no opinion. Its members hold on these problems whatever view appeals to their reason.

About one point, however, the Ethical Movement is quite clear and emphatic. Whether be one God or many—one God, three Gods, no God, or a million—the claim of the moral law is not thereby affected.

The absolutely clear demonstration that God does or does not exist, would not lessen or increase by so much as a fraction the allegiance which a man owes to the good. Whatever may be true in regard to the existence of God, there is unquestionably a right and a wrong, a good and an evil, and the moral ideal demands that a man should cleave to the one and disregard the other. Truth must be regarded, honesty must be encouraged, justice must be secured, and love and tenderness must prevail, whether the force that controls the universe is Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, a benevolent "All Father," or unintelligent law.

There is no doubt whatever that the disappearance of supernatural sanctions does involve re-adjustment of certain parts of the moral ideal, but it does not destroy the ideal itself. Nor does it weaken a man's enthusiasm

for the moral ideal, for just so soon as he realises that moral progress depends upon human effort and not on the intervention of deity will his own sense of personal responsibility be roused. If the wrong that exists in the world is due, not to the will of God, but to faulty human institutions, the chances are that just so soon as a man understands this he will set about improving them.

The natural sanction for moral activity is indeed far stronger and also more scientific than that usually given by the theologian, who insists that a man's duty to God takes precedence of his duty to his neighbour, and that his sense of duty to his neighbour is dependent on his belief in God. This is not a very high doctrine even at its best. "If you feel no motive to common morality" says George Eliot "but a criminal bar in heaven, you are decidedly a man for the police on earth to keep their eye upon."

The independence of the moral life is proved by both history and daily experience. Disbelief in Christian theology does not of necessity make a man a saint, nor does complete acceptance of it prevent him from sometimes becoming a scoundrel. Believers in orthodox creeds are admittedly not incorruptible, nor do those who reject particular forms of belief thereby prove themselves virtuous. Morality is evidenced, not by what a man believes, but by what he does; not by what he thinks, but by how he lives.

In reality, the church has given a false explanation for whatever goodness it has possessed. It has ascribed to a Supernatural Being principles of conduct, the source of which was within man himself. For instance, not one of the Ten Commandments rests upon any sanction of a future life, but upon the broad basis of human needs. "Moses and the prophets," says Strauss, "knew nothing of the immortality of the soul, yet Moses and the prophets they were still."

The Christian Church has always taught that man must look outside himself and the experience of his race for motives to right conduct, and she has contemptuously rejected the only living source of moral experience and

authority. The Ethical Movement discovers the motive to right conduct within the heart of man himself. The authority upon which a man's moral life is based is his own conscientious and reasoned judgment. Yet it is an authority which is not private, peculiar or eccentric, but one shared by all his neighbours as rational and social beings. Dr. Paley defined virtue to be "the doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness." The Ethical Movement repudiates this monstrous idea of morality. Men are not to do right because God requires it, or because it will pay. Virtue is not the product of cowardice nor fear of everlasting punishment. Morality is social and human; it derives its sanction from its own incomparable worth, and it is to be obeyed from no other motive than that it is right and dutiful and noble so to do. Righteousness has its foundations in the social and moral needs of man, and it requires no sanction outside the life we know; it is the product of long ages of human struggle and of human failure—of progress slowly and bitterly learned by human experience.

Is it alleged that this social sanction for right conduct is tame and uninteresting? All principles, when reduced to the abstract, are under the same disadvantage. It is only when applied to the million opportunities of the day that any principle is quickened and full of inspiring power. The Ethical Movement believes that the good life has an imperative claim upon us because of its supreme worth to humanity; that has its origin in the nature of man as a rational and social being; that it rests on no external authority and on no system of rewards and punishments. Its fundamental distinction from the Christian Church, is that it removes the motive for goodness away from rewards and punishments to the higher sanction of its own inherent worth, and away from an unknown heaven to the earth on which we live. It seeks to free morality as the other sciences have been freed—from the bondage of theology and tradition.

The Ethical Movement as a Religion.

It is a disadvantage to have to describe the Ethical Movement as a religion, for humanity is weary of both the name and the thing. Yet in the sense that it unites men in devotion to an ideal, the Ethical movement is, in fact, a religion. And the real point is whether all that is best in what the world calls religion is worth preserving, and, if so, how it shall be done.

Except in so far as the Christian Church teaches doctrines which science has abandoned as false, and that its ideal, like its history, is undemocratic, the Ethical Movement does not rejoice at its declining prestige. On the contrary there may, from its point of view, be a real danger in the decay of an institution, which has been charged with the duty of stimulating the moral sense, before its successor is properly equipped for its work.

Nevertheless, the Ethical Movement aims at superseding the Christian Church. It represents the religion of to-day and to-morrow, just as the church represents the religion of yesterday and of the day before. The Church looks back to Palestine for its ideal of perfection; the Ethical Movement clings to a progressive ideal, and looks with hope to the measureless opportunities of the future. The church finds its bond of union in the worship of Christ, thereby excluding from its fellowship all Jews, Buddhists, Mohammedans, Confucians, Theists, and Agnostics, while the Ethical Movement finds its bond of union in the ideal of goodness which is common to men of every creed. The church worships a person; the Ethical Movement an idea—an idea accepted by the enlightened conscience of mankind. It brings to the service of man everything that was vital in the old religions of the world—love, mercy, pity, peace—and it offers these indispensable qualities as the only universal bond of religious union. It takes all moral achievement from whatever source, and by freeing it from all that is doctrinal, exclusive and unessential, makes it the starting point of a further moral development.

The Ethical Movement therefore claims to be the religion of the Twentieth Century. It fills, moreover, a long-felt want. There are many thousands of people in England to-day who no longer believing as their fathers believed, dissent from the doctrines taught by the churches, and have therefore ceased to attend them. To a growing number of these spiritual outcasts, the Ethical Movement is more and more becoming the source of that inspiration and happiness which they had hitherto sought in vain. It fills a place which the churches have left void, a place which must be filled if the breach with current religious belief is not to bring moral decay.

The Ethical Movement, while preserving all that is valuable in the old religious thought, is at the same time an enthusiastic exponent of the modern intellectual spirit. And "if that which is done away with was glorious, how much more that which remaineth is glorious." It has been a very difficult and painful thing to be a Christian minister during the last fifty years. One doctrine after another has been destroyed, one prerogative after another taken away, and it has sometimes seemed as though nothing was left for mankind to believe. Nearly everything that men like Moody and Spurgeon taught respecting the universe has been rejected as incorrect even by the church itself, while practically everything that Huxley demanded in the name of reason has been conceded. The result of all this questioning analysis has been a temporary paralysis of the religious spirit. Theology is discredited; the churches are for the most part empty, and the world is completely indifferent to what the church either thinks or says. When His Grace of Canterbury pleads few respond, and when the Pope admonishes no one is afraid.

Side by side with all this destruction of old forms and doctrines, has proceeded a new grouping of facts and ideas, and the gradual shaping of a new synthesis. A new religion is taking the place of the old, a religion that is as acceptable to the intellect as to the heart. The Ethical Movement, searching for some point of unity between the old religious aspiration and the new demands of the intellect, finds it in that which is common to both, in the moral ideal and in the good of mankind.

The Ethical Movement approaches its work from the three sides of personal conduct, intellectual culture, and social progress, and it insists that each individual has duties and responsibilities in all these directions. But the Ethical Movement does not make an idol even of morality. It has no absolute or fixed standard as to what constitutes goodness, nor does it constitute itself judge as to what conduct is right or wrong; it realises that the future may modify much that seems firmly established to-day, and that the principles of conduct will need revision from age to age. Neither does the Ethical Movement welcome moral cranks who seek to exalt at the expense of sane and healthy instincts some special moral rule. It has no use for people who merely want to ride some moral hobby; it is not effeminate, nor does it encourage asceticism nor an anæmic piety. It is virile, sane and normal, and it is based upon healthy human needs and experience.

How the Ethical Movement does its Work.

The Ethical Movement seeks to carry on its work by means of regular Sunday meetings where the speakers seek to present the best that is being taught on Philosophy, Religion, Education, History, Literature, and Social Science, their aim being to emphasise the ethical aspect of each subject. These lectures are often followed by discussion, while readings from great writers and congregational singing generally form part of the proceedings.

An Ethical Society aims at promoting fellowship without distinction of class; it lays stress on intellectual culture, stands for liberty of expression, and endeavours by its form of government, by lectures and discussions on political, religious and other subjects, to fit its members for their personal, civic, and social duties. It aims, in short, at helping men to love, know, and do the right.

The Ethical Movement forms Societies rather than churches, because the word Society is more descriptive of its attitude and aims. The word "church" has so often been synonymous with oppression, persecution, and hostility to freedom of thought and speech, that it

cannot describe what Ethical Societies are. The Ethical Movement is not hierarchical, but co-operative and democratic, and the word Society, which connotes social brotherhood, is democratic both in tone and tradition, and implies neither priesthood nor any sort of invested authority, is the name under which it works.

In thus cutting itself off from the churches and starting its own separate life, the Ethical Movement is on the true line of development. It does not, however, suggest that other churches are without value, nor that it is the only true church to which on the pain of damnation all men must belong; but it believes that in promise for good it is superior to any other church, inasmuch as it alone emphasises and raises to the supreme place in men's regard, the good that is common to all churches, and because it offers us a platform upon which all who put righteousness before ceremony and metaphysical speculation can unite.

Fellowship in the Moral Life.

One of the great cornerstones of the Ethical Movement is its doctrine of Fellowship. It imposes no barrier of creed or dogma between a man and communion with his fellows. Every man who believes in the good as the supreme thing in life can join it. The Ethical Movement excludes no one from its fellowship. But it cannot accept a second-hand devotion. No man may join it as a stimulating interlude between the cares and trials of the City, nor from motives of intellectual curiosity, and then retire to some private sanctuary to offer supreme devotion to another ideal. Like love, the moral ideal will tolerate no rival. It demands from a man all or nothing. The Ethical Movement offers the moral ideal as the supreme object of religious devotion, and it cannot accept a divided allegiance.

The Ethical Movement emphasises its doctrine of fellowship, because it holds that a man needs to refresh himself continually by drinking deeply of the springs of moral enthusiasm, and this he can only do in communion with his fellows. Fellowship in the moral life is spiritual communism, to which a man gives according to his

strength and from which he takes according to his need. If a man's moral impulses are weak he needs the strength born of communion with his fellows ; while if he is strong in these qualities his weaker brethren need him.

The Ethical Movement is therefore opposed to either intellectual or spiritual isolation, and its members, in meeting together, enjoy that peace and strength which only fellowship can give. The Ethical Movement is not, therefore, a rendezvous for audacious thinkers, but a centre of moral and social inspiration.

Not a Political Movement.

The Ethical Movement is not political in the sense of being favourable to one or other of the great parties that govern the State. But it does not aim at a lofty detachment from the secular issues that stir men's blood. It does not seek to escape its responsibility for the social wrong that exists, by a carefully calculated neutrality. On the contrary, while insisting on the value of the moral life both to the individual and to the community, the Ethical Movement demands such a change in society as will make a perfect moral life possible. The whole Ethical ideal centres in a cleaner, braver, better, stronger race, and the aim of the Ethical Movement is to make it possible for each human being to "attain unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness." At present this is not possible. Millions of our fellow creatures are daily battered out of all possibility of a richly developed manhood. They starve, and toil, and freeze, and die without ever tasting the joys of knowledge, of beauty, of life. Much of the evil that now arises in connection with the organisation of modern industry is due to the ignorance and indifference to social duties and obligations, not only among the employing classes, but also in the ranks of the masses themselves. The Ethical Movement therefore declares that the social question is at bottom a moral question, a religious question, a question of immediate practical concern for every individual society or nation. But it is not a question of party politics. The Ethical Movement dissociates itself from explicit political dogma, but

heartily encourages every endeavour having for its end the attainment of a proper human standard of comfort for every class of the community. It affirms its belief that the moral question is for certain sections of the nation a food question, a housing question, a wage question. Under present social conditions the highest development of the moral faculties is open only to the very few. To the slum dweller, the half-starved peasant, the sweated seamstress, the overworked and underpaid dock labourer, it is almost impossible.

Civilisation ascends from material to moral standards, and in order to live well it is first necessary to be able to live at all. After bread come education and moral betterment. The individual who, like the savage, spends all his energy in the conquest for bread is doomed, like the savage to a mere animal existence.

The Ethical Movement and the Labour Movement are therefore very closely related. They are interdependent, and they must stand or fall together. The Ethical Movement inspires a fervour that demands reform, but it is not blind to the fact that without reform its own ideals have little chance of acceptance by the great masses of the community. The Ethical Movement is practical and secular, catholic and human ; it seeks to elevate the mass as well as the individual. It offers its principles as the starting point for the operations of people of differing political methods, and holds itself bound to support every effort to remove the barriers that stand in the way of the development of the moral life.

On the other hand, the social movement is no less dependent on the scattered moral forces of the community. A political or economic policy that neglects the moral issues of society is foredoomed to failure. Life must develop from within. Even the best form of society will require to have its basis in character, and all economic reform is dependent for its success on elevated standards of personal honour. Social reform has hitherto halted because the moral forces available have lacked organisation ; the full reconstructing energies of the country have not been utilised, and reform movements have in consequence been weakened. The Ethical

Movement, therefore, allies itself with the cause of social reform, and endeavours to secure for all men the possibility of a fully developed moral and physical life.

Need for a New Faith.

Finally, the Ethical Movement believes that the Twentieth Century will require for its tasks the inspiration of a great new faith. But not faith in authority, priests, books, or churches. Of such faith there is already far too much. The faith required must quicken and stimulate a passionate belief in the good and in its ultimate triumph; it must nerve mankind to work for justice in human affairs, and implant in the heart of every man a passion for a fuller and richer life.

To create this faith is the purpose of the Ethical Movement, and it appeals for the co-operation and support of all good men.

Copies of this Pamphlet may be obtained from the Author at 12, Lauderdale Tower, London, E.C., price 10d. net post free; also from the Author and Secretary to Lectures in the Science Museum, or the Secretary, Library, Lectures and Publications Office, Temple-on-Sea.

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